

They agreed on problem, but not the solution

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Body

Everyone agrees Canada has to act. In this election, it was always just a matter of how.

For the first time in Canadian political history, every major federal party took the threat of climate change seriously and offered platform policies that would - if implemented - meaningfully reduce this country's annual greenhouse gas emissions.

As results poured in on Monday night, it was not immediately clear how the dust would settle after 36 days of campaigning in which all parties postured and jockeyed over climate change and what Canada should do about it.

The major difference in this campaign was that the national carbon price - a major point of contention in Canadian climate politics since the Liberals took power - was no longer controversial. The Conservatives, who had disparaged the policy for years as a "job-killing tax on everything," decided to finally come around and offer voters a carbon price of their own.

Under Erin O'Toole's climate plan, the federal government would maintain a carbon price on consumer fuel, as well as a separate system for industrial polluters.

The big difference is that the Conservatives pledged to limit the fuel price to \$50 per tonne of emissions, while the Trudeau Liberals pledged to increase it to \$170 per tonne by 2030.

The Conservatives would also change the way the federal government currently returns proceeds from the carbon price to individuals, replacing the flat payments that exist now with a rewards-style "Personal Low Carbon Savings Account." This would allow people to use the exact same amount of money they pay into the levy on "green" purchases such as bikes and new furnaces.

But even with this shift in policy, the Liberals argued throughout the campaign that O'Toole's Conservatives offered a regressive and inadequate plan to fight climate change. Not only was their platform weaker, but so was their ambition, Liberals charged, for O'Toole's Conservatives only pledged to hit Canada's old climate target of 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.

While O'Toole insisted this would mean his party would achieve Canada's commitment under the international Paris Agreement from 2015, the Liberals had in fact updated Canada's pledge to the world community earlier this year. Now the country's official target is to cut emissions by at least 40 per cent before 2030.

In the battle for progressive votes, however, the Liberals had to defend their own plan against allegations from the New Democrats and Greens that their climate action after six years in power was inadequate and that their plan for the future fell short.

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The Liberals promised to crank up climate action if they returned to power, in part by tackling emissions from Canada's two largest sources of greenhouse gas pollution: the fossil fuel sector and transportation.

The party pledged to cap emissions from the oil and gas industry starting in 2025 and continue with stricter regulations until they hit "net zero" - when they're eliminated or captured through technology and nature - by 2050. The Liberals also said they would mandate that all new cars sold in 2035 are zero-emission vehicles.

But NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh argued through the campaign that Trudeau could not be trusted to take serious climate action.

As evidence, he pointed to how emissions have gone up since 2015 (by about one per cent), as well as the fact that the Liberals have not yet phased out government subsidies for the fossil fuel sector. The Liberals promised to remove subsidies for oil and gas production and exploration by 2025.

Singh said an NDP government would do so immediately, while also blocking oil and gas companies from accessing tax incentives for the resource sector, as well as pledging to slash emissions by 50 per cent before the end of the decade.

The NDP, however, also walked back certain stances on climate. While Singh spoke of removing "exemptions" in the federal carbon price for heavy polluters, his party would in fact keep the system in place while just making it stricter for industrial emitters.

The NDP leader also clarified his position on the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, stating that while he has always opposed the government-owned project, he might not cancel it if he formed government.

Meanwhile, the Greens - long the standard-bearer for the most aggressive climate action in federal politics - entered the campaign wounded from prolonged party infighting. Their leader, Annamie Paul, was fighting Monday for her political future in the downtown riding of Toronto-Centre.

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